

# Motivation at Work of Brazilian Executives

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**Abstract** – This study aimed to verify the extent to which the Brazilian executives are motivated at work. Companies seek constantly for practices that allow greater motivation of employees in day-to-day activities. Such search gets particularly important when looking at the work of executives in Brazil, in which working conditions are extremely stressful, whether by race against time, either by issues relating to the relationship among people. Traditional management theory seems to be ineffective when searching for the solution of problems related to the process of management of employees motivation.

**Keywords** – Motivation, Brazilian Executives, Logistics, Neuromotivation, People Management.

## 1. Introduction

The world is increasingly dynamic. All this dynamism has reversal effects in the intensive conditions at work, stressful traffic, boss demands, little time for personal life, among other many stress factors in everyday's professionals life. The professionals are getting discouraged with their job's life. Particularly in the logistics industry which requires much control and rigorous deadlines, as very few other economy' segments have. This generates a huge concern for businesses, particularly for people management departments. Thus the big question for companies is how to better understand the motivation at work?

The answer to this question is not easily answered. However, recent studies on the subject of neuroeconomics applied to motivation at work point to three crucial factors:

- we are influenced by our genetics features;
- the working environment is important for

the workers's performance;

- it is possible to change brain connections, with training processes, to act in a more motivated way at work.

Some managers *status quo* may hinder the improvement of some aspects related to motivation in their working life. This happens despite the scientific evidence that humans are not as rational as it is proposed by many studies of Orthodox Economics. In truth, just a few number of large companies have awakened to this reality. These companies already use some incipient forms of these physiological techniques using also the study of the brain itself to the professionals development. These companies have been deployed in front of the rivals in this area.

People are partially programmed in order to present specific reactions before a stimulus. For example, many people's body low production of the serotonin neurotransmitter tend to feel much more a "hard lesson" from their boss, what sometimes makes them to become less motivated.

However, not everything depends on genetics. The truth is that the environment and life experience of each one also influences on vocational motivation. Just imagine a professional who has just been hired to take a big job in a company. Arriving there he is placed in a room with terrible conditions of structure, accompanied by bad employees and to complete this scenario he finds out that there are several types of moral abuse in the company. Certainly, he comes to a frustration situation, being led to think about going back to the old job. The conditions of the working environment **are** important, because the brain will

present reactions as the body's interaction with that environment. Genetics and professional's life experience will determine the perception. If this perception is negative it tends to undermine his forces for the proper execution of his work.

Therefore, unlike the dominant idea in the corporate world of hard management of motivation, it may be possible to manage the process of motivation in the company through a new vision bringing interesting results. There is an important methodological difference. While the traditional model is based on subjective criteria, which leads to disbelief of the effectiveness of the method, the strand of neuroeconomics utilizes physiological variables which facilitates the quantitative treatment of information collected and therefore allows a better management of the motivation.

## 2. Motivation at Work

Motivation is an internal strength of the individual that allows the creation of personal and economic value through a specific action. Using a brief query to the dictionary, some specs on the meaning of motivation can result, as follows: motivation is the act of raising the interest for something; there is a set of factors that determine the conduct of someone; it is the process that triggers a conscious activity. Considering these appointments, some clarifications can be performed. The motivation awakens a desire because it is linked to the performance of activities that direct the individual to reach his goal. These activities are specific and so it is possible to find there a set of factors that influence the result and the achievement of the goal. It is conscious because the motivation is materialized in physical and mental developmental activities for the realization of tasks.

Although there is a concisely concept of motivation found in the dictionaries, these definitions may little explain the motivation related to economic life.

Motivation is an issue that has aroused much interest on scholars now and in the past. Several are the conceptual aspects in this area. Some ideas related to the motivation conceptualization relating to various areas of study can be presented as follows:

- In ancient Greece, the Greek philosophers believed that the motivation was fruit of the hedonists principles. In this way each individual should at all minimize the pain and maximize pleasure.

- Considering the concepts focused on economic life, it is necessary to identify the motivation derived from studies of orthodox economists, for which every action in economic life is motivated by a possibility of optimization of productive resources. Therefore, the individual acts on the basis of how much he expects to win (not losing) for each action. For example, faced with the possibility of investing in an ice cream parlor that would yield 7% per month or of investing a fixed income investment in a commercial bank that pays 11%, he will surely not invest in the ice cream shop to invest in the fixed income. However, in the course of this text, it can be seen that human brain works differently than expected, in particular, on the assessment of risk, uncertainty and trial.
- Motivation refers to the forces that drive and sustain the efforts of people in a particular direction (see Bateman and Snell, quoted by Macedo *et al*, 2006). Already for Motta cited by Macedo *et al* (2006, p. 92) motivation is the energy coming from the set of aspirations, desires, values, challenges and individual sensitivities, manifested through specific goals and tasks. According to Porter cited by Macedo *et al* (2006, p. 92) the ideal conditions to have strong motivation are the ones in which personal energies and skills are sufficient to meet organizational expectations, and resources of the organization are also suitable to meet the individual needs and goals.

Despite the enormous effort of many authors in various areas of knowledge now, with the advent of modern neuroscience, scientists have additional tools to deliver results with an increased efficiency in motivation study.

It is important that a professional is motivated to achieve his goals. Generically, in the professional's life a professional will be motivated if he is able to get the achievement and success; in the economic life, motivation means to have a greater productivity and value creation.

Motivated employees tend to be loyal and dedicated and become, willingly, "ambassadors" of their companies. Actually, it is common knowledge the

fact that companies with motivated employees have lower employees to leave the company and tend to outperform their competitors in sales and profits (see Silverstein, 2013, p. 14).

People, in average, may spend a third of their lives in the workplace. In this sense, identifying factors that allow motivation is essential for good performances, especially in this contemporary world, where the search for innovative professionals is increasing each day. Without motivation there is no innovation. Therefore, companies around the world are conspicuous by their professionals' selection and training to get able to be motivated and so providing innovations for the company.

A motivated team of professionals is essentially more productive and ultimately influences much of the company. This is the "contagion effect" that implies the distribution or propagation of a meme to a social group. However, a professional without motivation has the power to contaminate the others negatively.

In this context, both endogenous factors like genetic formation of a professional, as exogenous factors as, for example, life experience, education or culture, can determine whether a professional will be motivated at work.

Imagine a person who is in his first professional stages in a company, who is humiliated constantly at work, affecting his moral values, performing his tasks without receiving any feedback from other colleagues or his superior. What will determine whether the professional feels negatively about this situation is his way of being which, as seen before, depends on the genetic formation and experience of life. Every time the individual interacts with the environment, his brain will process the information by choosing at last the possible perception based on these two factors (see Berns, 2009).

In a series of recent studies, it was evidenced that the contempt at work activates brain regions responsible for pain. In this way, something that seemed without much importance is showed to be essential among the many factors that the leader must manage in his day to day professional life.

When a professional suffers from the lack of motivation he enters in a situation of "airplane mode" at work. He no longer transmits or receives information, he does not connect anymore to anyone

and he is operating at work without being engaged in the objectives of the company and its team.

After having seen some specific points it is necessary to make some additional notes about job satisfaction, by starting considering the following question: letting the employee fully satisfied at work is good? An apparently unpretentious question is configured, in truth, as a paradox. A professional who is fully satisfied at work runs the serious risk of getting into a motivational danger zone. This fact is consistent with the operation of the brain reward system.

Having a professional doing his best regardless of existing context in the company is, with no doubt, one of the biggest challenges of contemporary companies. However, the absence of brain research techniques did not allow an assertive approach.

On the basis of modern research techniques in neuroscience, today it is possible to present solutions with a high level of precision and effectiveness for generating personal motivation.

According to Nohria *et al* (2008, p. 86) the human being is guided (motivated) by four basic impulses. They are:

- Impulse purchase - we are all moved to obtain scarce goods that reinforce our sense of well-being. We get thrilled when these wishes are satisfied and we are thwarted when that desire is frustrated. This phenomenon applies not only to physical goods like food and clothing, housing or money, but also to experiences like travel and leisure and, of course, for things that improve the social status of the individual, as being promoted and earn a larger room or taking place in the Council of the company. The impulse to acquire tends to be relative (we are always comparing what we have with the possessions of others) and insatiable (we always want more). This explains why people call not only for their own salary, but for everybody else's, too. And it also shows why it is so hard to impose salary ceilings.
- Boost to form tie - Many animals create bonds with their parents, with family members or the tribe, but only man extends these bonds to larger groups, such as organizations, associations and Nations. The

desire to form ties, when satisfied, is associated with strong emotions such as love and care and, if not, the negative feelings such as loneliness and anemia. At work, the desire of forming ties, if accomplished, allows a huge increase in motivation when people feel proud to belong to the Organization and is followed by the collapse in their morale when betrayed by the institution. There is also a big difficulty in breaking divisional or functional sets: people get connected to the closest colleagues. However, sometimes there is the ability to establish links with larger groups leading the person to care more about the Organization as a whole rather than a particular group within it.

- Impulse to understand – There is a great desire to understand the world around and to produce theories and scientific, religious and cultural reports that allow the understanding of facts and suggest actions and reasonable answers. We feel frustration when something seems meaningless. The challenge of seeking answers, generically, energizes us. At work, the impulse to understand makes us to desire to give a significant contribution. The individual is motivated by a job that challenges and allows him to grow and to learn; an individual demoralize by the activity that sounds dull or seems to lead to nowhere. Feeling without prospects, a talent worker may tend to leave the company to get challenges elsewhere.
- Impulse to defend himself - we have a natural impulse to defend ourselves from external threats: our own person, our possessions, our achievements, our family and friends, our ideas and beliefs. This desire has its origin in the basic fight-or-flight response common to most animals. In man, manifested not only as a defensive or aggressive behavior, but also how to create institutions that promote justice, which have clear goals and intentions and to allow people to express their ideas and opinions. Satisfied this impulse of defending, a feeling of trust and security is produced; otherwise a feeling of frustration generates negative feelings like fear and resentment. The

human impulse to defend himself says a lot about the people's resistance to change; it is one of the reasons why people can be devastated by the possibility of a merger or acquisition - an especial significant change may come even though the business is the only way out for the survival of the organization. A person can hear, for example, which has excellent performance and it is essential for the success of the company, but the next day may be informed that he/she may lose his/her job due to a restructuring; it is a direct challenge what makes the individual to tend to defend from the uncertainty.

Each of the four pulses described above is independent; there is no way to sort them hierarchically or to trade one for another. It is useless paying a wonderful salary and expecting the people get excited by the work in an organization that does not promote the formation of ties, or in which the work seems without sense or people feel helpless. Besides, it is not enough just to help people to establish links and form a cohesive team when wages are low or the job is boring. Obviously it is possible to have people working in this context. However, they will never work hard enough for reaching companies' aims (see Nohria *et al*, 2008, p. 89).

While contemplating the four basic emotional impulses of personnel is essential to any company, research carried out suggests that each of them reacts better to a distinct and specific organizational lever (see Nohria *et al*, 2008, p. 89), as suggested:

Awards system - the best channel to the satisfaction of the impulse to acquire is the awards system of the organization – awarding the best with effectiveness, rewarding according to the performance and giving the chance of progressing to the best performances.

Culture - the best way to satisfy the urge to form ties is to generate a strong sense of camaraderie by creating a culture that promotes teamwork, collaboration, openness and friendship.

Design of work - to satisfy the impulse to understand the best is to make the work interesting, challenging, with sense.

Performance management processes and resource allocation - fair, reliable processes and transparent

performance management and allocation of resources help to satisfy the desire of people's defense.

According to Nohria *et al* (2008, p. 88) for evaluating the motivation is necessary to measure four basic indicators:

- Involvement - the involvement represents the energy, effort and initiative that the individual displays at work;
- Satisfaction - satisfaction reflects the extent to which workers believe that the company satisfies their expectations at work and complies implicit and explicit contracts signed with all;
- Commitment - the commitment shows to what extent the workers engage in corporate citizenship;
- Intention of leaving the company - the intention of leaving the company is the best indicator of workers' leaving the company.

So, the motivation at work appears in the emergence of a new model. This model is based on motivational impulses that direct the study of motivation, not to the reasoning ability, but rather to the unconscious side of decisions.

### 3. The Study

To carry out the study an investigation was conducted with executives of the cities of Ribeirão Preto, Franca, Campinas, São José do Rio Preto, Caxias do Sul, Curitiba. The ultimate goal is to map the motivation of those executives as much as the intermediate objectives:

- verify the involvement with the work;
- job satisfaction;
- the commitment in the work; and
- the intention to leave the company.

The study was conducted between July 2013 and April 2014 by sending emails to the executives. The criterion for choosing the sample was based on accessibility.

#### 3.1 Results

Figure 1. Involvement on Work

Options for the Answers	Answers (%)	Answers (number)
1	1.5 %	2
2	4.5 %	6
3	19.7 %	26
4	31.1 %	41
5	43.2 %	57
Total	100%	132

Source: Authors, based on field research

Considering a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represents a lesser degree of involvement and 5 the greatest possible degree. It was observed that most of the respondents have high involvement with the current work (the involvement represents the energy, effort and initiative that the individual displays at work).

Figure 2. Satisfaction with current job

Options for the Answers	Answers (%)	Answers (number)
1	4.5 %	6
2	18.0 %	24
3	23.3 %	31
4	36.8 %	49
5	17.3 %	23
Total	100%	134

Source: Authors, based on field research

Considering the satisfaction with current job, it is observed that most of the respondents consider themselves satisfied with the current work (the degree of satisfaction reflects the extent to which the respondents believe that the company satisfies their expectations at work and implicit and explicit contracts signed complies with everyone at work).

Figure 3. Commitment at work

Options for the Answers	Answers (%)	Answers (number)
1	2.3 %	3
2	5.3 %	7
3	12.0 %	16
4	36.1 %	48
5	44.4 %	59
Total	100%	133

Source: Authors, based on field research

As regards commitment most employees present high commitment to work (the appointment shows how far the respondents engage in corporate citizenship).

Figure 4. Intention of leaving the company

Options for the Answers	Answers (%)	Answers (number)
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1	18.7%	25
2	11.9%	16
3	23.1%	31
4	22.4%	30
5	23.9%	32
Total	100%	134

Source: Authors, based on field research

The intention of leaving the company is an important indicator because it measures the rotation in occupied positions in the company. In this case, the higher the index, the less willingness to leave the company. Considering the results, it is possible to see that Brazilian executives have little desire to leave the company at the moment. This can be checked by seeing that the sum of the larger values (3, 4 and 5) reached 69.4%.

**Figure 5. Schooling**

Options for the Answers	Answers (%)	Answers (number)
High School	2.2 %	3
Higher Education	27.6 %	37
Graduate/MBA	55.2 %	74
Master's Degree	9.0 %	12
PhD	4.5 %	6
Postdoctoral	1.5 %	2
Total	100%	134

Source: Authors, based on field research

Based on the results it was possible to verify that the vast majority of respondents (55.2%) have completed at least one MBA course, 27.6% completed higher education. Joining holders of master's degrees, doctorate and post-doctorate, a percentage of 15% was obtained. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the executives that were interviewed have excellent academic training. This is not surprising once they are the elite of Brazilian professionals.

**Figure 6. Sex**

Options for the Answers	Answers (%)	Answers (number)
Male	67.7 %	88
Female	32.3 %	42
Total	100%	130

Source: Authors, based on field research

Taking into account that 67.7% of respondents are male and 32.3% female, it can be inferred that this result points to a growing trend of occupation of executive positions by women in Brazil. However, it is still a low percentage compared to the executive positions occupied by men.

**Figure 7. Age**

Options for the Answers	Answers (%)	Answers (number)
18	0.0 %	0
19-20	1.5 %	2
21-30	23.1 %	31
31-40	41.0 %	55
41-50	29.9 %	40
51-60	3.0 %	4
61-70	1.5 %	2
71-80	0.0 %	0
More than 80	0.0 %	0
Total	100%	134

Source: Authors, based on field research

Based on the results obtained from the executives interviewed, it is possible to see that most of them are between the ages of 31-40 years (approximately 41%). Then 29.9% of respondents are aged 41-50 years. Finally, 23.1% are between the ages of 21-30 years. This result reflects a certain normality in terms of occupation of executive positions as it is necessary to have some experience in the market.

**Figure 8. Remuneration for work**

Options for the Answers	Answers (%)	Answers (number)
1	6.0 %	8
2	16.5 %	22
3	41.4 %	55
4	27.8 %	37
5	8.3 %	11
Total	100%	133

Source: Authors, based on field research

Considering the obtained results it is possible to verify that the executives interviewed are reasonably satisfied with the compensation they receive: 41.4% of respondents appear in rating 3 (which is exactly in the middle of the table) and other 27.8% considered the score 4 as representative of their satisfaction with the remuneration received.

### 3.2 Some Notes about the Results

Based on the results obtained with the field research it is possible to mention some few notes about the motivation of Brazilian executives of classes A and B, as follows:

- Employees generally are motivated to work, given the degree of engagement, satisfaction, commitment and desire to leave the company;

- Executives who responded to the questionnaire were involved with the work. Perhaps a prudent explanation for this result is the level of requirement demanded in executive positions. Then it is expected that executives in particular, at the beginning and mid-career, may create high an expectations level for professional growth;
- In the question regarding job satisfaction the executives' respondents also presented a high degree of satisfaction. Compared to so many jobs on the market the wages, benefits and bonuses of executives portray themselves as the best in the labor market as a whole;
- The commitment to the job is another point at which respondents showed an high degree, that represents the degree in which he participates in the company's culture;
- The intention of leaving the company was the variable that was more balanced on top of the table, although the majority of respondents said not be willing to leave the company at the time;
- Respecting the general data of the respondents: more than a half have complete postgraduate course, with age varying between 21 and 51 years, 67% of respondents were male and 33% female;
- Finally, a variable was included beyond the scope proposed for measuring the satisfaction with the income received by executives. At this point, a little contradiction, because the executives presented neutrality; neither satisfied nor dissatisfied regarding the retribution for the work they offer to the market.

#### 4. Some Conclusions

Facing new challenges derived from new forms of allocation of resources, in particular, of the media which require speed, accuracy and diverse skills of executives, it is possible to observe that the class A and B Brazilian managers have high motivation at work.

Despite the proposed indicators show that professionals are motivated not ends the discussion,

because it is necessary to find out by other means of investigation about the four impulses. For example, physiological research like reading facials' microexpressions may allow to discover what the main emotions are involved, being one way to reach the aims of this kind of study.

Another point concerns the fact that even for a questionnaire survey the sample was small and not adequately geographically distributed. This happens because the universe studied is difficult to reach, given the short time these professionals have available to parallel issues in addition to the functions carried out at work.

Despite the difficulties relating to the investigation, can be inferred that when considering the four basic impulses (urge to acquire, to form ties, to understand and to defend) to analyze the level of motivation at work, the survey reveals interesting results on the analytical contents compared to traditional models.

In this way it is possible to ascertain that when considering the theory of the four impulses the executives show high motivation at work.

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